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Many Improvements in Our Government Needed, Says Vice-President Marshall, Critical Observer

Has Praise For England's Form, Especially the Vote of Confidence, and Says Our System Is Breaking Down Presidents---Suggests Single Six Year Term, Modification of the Primary Plan and Emphasizes the Need of a Budget---Deplores the Growth of Executive Power, With Resultant Duplication of Work, and Favors Full Eight Hour Day for Government Clerks, With Weeding Out of Incompetents by a Supreme Board

By DONALD M'GREGOR.

NEW YORK HERALD BUREAU.

WASHINGTON, D. C., Jan. 8.

THOMAS RILEY MARSHALL has been Vice-President of the United States for almost eight years—through a period equally as vital, if not more so, than at any other of similar length in American history.

They have been eight crowded years of war, of international readjustment, of ticklish domestic problems. They have been eight years of governmental innovations, sometimes revolutionary in their conception; eight desperate years of meeting emergencies that shook the very foundations of our national life.

Throughout this period Mr. Marshall, as the presiding officer of the United States Senate, has been a powerful force in the solution of these mighty questions. Most of the time, gavel in hand, he has sat back and listened, quietly exercising his influence here and there when occasion required. And at the same time he has gathered some definite opinions as to our method of government. The views are not all complimentary, but they are sincere and filled with common sense.

On the rostrum in the Senate Mr. Marshall, keen, observing and a student of men, has had an opportunity to watch the giant Government machine go lumbering along and to take notes on the conduct of those assigned as engineers and firemen. He has had, in a way, an exclusive reserved seat.

Speaks His Mind Very Freely.

Willing to Share Observations

Mr. Marshall is about to leave Washington, giving way to the change of administration on March 4. So, upon the eve of his departure, before the actual packing of his trunk begins, I sought his opinions as those of a man who asks nothing in politics and who, for the good it will do us in these days of national discontent, is willing to pass along the results of his broad experience.

I found Mr. Marshall behind his desk in the Senate Office Building, a man small of stature, alert, full to the brim with native Hoosier wit, forceful and worth hearing. In the hour we had together Mr. Marshall talked of a number of things, all pertaining to government. And so, as he spoke to me, I set it down for you:

"My association in Washington has been most pleasant," Mr. Marshall began, "and of course I do not wish to be critical. At the same time it is obvious that many things are wrong with our system of government which could, and should, be corrected. I am old fashioned in many ways and it may be my opinions will not strike a popular chord.

"To begin with, we have gotten away entirely from our original idea of representative government. It never was intended that this should be a pure democracy. The fathers who established the system believed it best to delegate the power of the Government to those who were best fitted to exercise it.

"If you have something wrong inside of you you send for a doctor, not a plumber; if you want to build a house you hire an architect. There are in this country, unquestionably, men far better fitted to deal with governmental affairs than others; this fact should be accepted.

Praise For England's Form,

Especially Vote of Confidence

"England, I believe, has the ideal form of government. It is a system by which the very best minds are attracted to the work of the Government. One of the features of the English system would be of advantage in the United States—it is a dream, perhaps, and would have to be worked out carefully in relation to the system now in force—and that is the occasional vote of confidence in the Government.

"Our present system of electing the President and the Vice-President ought to be changed to that originally intended. It was the way Washington and others of our

early Presidents were named. The Presidential primaries we have now mean nothing at all; there is much foolishness about our national political conventions; there is much evil in the customary Presidential campaigns as we have established them.

"What this country ought to do would be to select the best possible men as electors, following out the system which now is in force, and then send them to Washington to choose the President. These men, chosen by the people in consideration of their special fitness for the duty, and in respect to the parties and policies for which they stood, could be relied upon to vote for the best qualified men to head the Government.

"It may not be generally realized, but the truth is that with the present method there is nothing to prevent a duly chosen elector from voting for anybody he chooses for President. We say that Senator Harding has been elected President. All right, when it comes to the Electoral College there would be nothing in the world to prevent one of the electors from voting for some other man, or all of them, for that matter. They could name, for instance, Gen. Wood, and the people could do nothing about it except swear at the electors.

Believes That Only a Handful of People Read Platform

"I have serious doubt if more than a handful of people in the United States have read the platforms of the two chief political parties adopted at their national conventions. They were long and tedious and devised to get votes. It took me two and three-quarter hours to read the Democratic platform at San Francisco. The platforms mean nothing, and the nomination of a candidate as the party leader merely tends to bring personalities into the campaign.

"This nation is breaking down its Presidents. It will continue to break them down so long as the present system exists. The fault is with the demand that the President be the leader of the party as well as the Chief Executive of the country. Every time somebody or some group wants something he or they wire or write to bring pressure to bear, and then if it doesn't materialize the President is blamed.

"In my judgment there should be a single term for Presidents, say six years, which would fit in better with our scheme of elections, rather than a seven year term, as advocated by some. Presidents, after all, are human, and while I could not truthfully say that I believed that any Presidential action had been influenced by politics, it is only fair that that consideration be removed. It would, I feel, make a President at least feel freer in the performance of his duty.

Length of Service an Asset for Members of Both Houses

"So far as the Senate and the House are concerned, it seems to me that length of service is an asset to the country. Men who devote themselves over a long period of legislative service to a study of governmental affairs naturally are superior to those with less experience.

"There is much fault in the primary system. I have been opposed to it for a long time on the ground that it opened the way for public office to only two groups of men. First, those who were sufficiently rich to make the race on their own account, and, second, those who did not have the means themselves but the friends who did, and who were willing to put up the money required for such a campaign. In either case, of course, it restricts the group which is available for public office; in the case of men whose friends supply the necessary money for an expensive campaign, they naturally are under obligations to those friends, a thing not good for government."

"Would you," I asked, "abolish the primary system?"

"I would advocate an intermediate system," replied Mr. Marshall, "one which would do away with the often unjust clamor about the political boss. It could be accomplished by holding an optional primary, to be arranged upon the demand of any twenty-five citizens of a county. This would

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be for the purpose of electing delegates to a State convention.

"The candidates for delegate would sign a statement that they were not pledged to any candidate for office, but would go to the convention determined to use their best judgment in selecting the best and most competent candidates. The nominations would, of course, be made by the convention.

"There is no reason why this system should not be extended to the selection of the Presidential electors to represent the different parties and who would, upon their election, get together and choose the best available man for President.

Should Provide Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures

"It is a popular thing just now to talk about a budget system for the Government, but few persons who talk about it know what a budget system really is. It simply sounds good to talk about. Any budget system worth while should provide estimates of revenue and expenditures for at least five years.

"One of the troubles about the United States Government is that the executive branch grows and grows. There is no doubt about there being much duplication of work. If you get into a subject you don't know where to go to get the information. If you are hunting a ramrod you are just as likely to find it in the Department of Agriculture as anywhere else.

"One of the difficulties experienced when it comes to cutting down expense is that every Government employee has twenty-five or thirty friends at home who use their influence to keep him on the job. It is only natural, therefore, that they bring pressure to bear on members of Congress for their retention. If it is announced that a clerk is to be dropped the member of the Senate or House, on hearing from the folks back home, hurry up to the department chief and find out about it. 'Don't fire Bill Smith,' they say; 'fire somebody else.'

Absence of Public Land in Missouri Nears Twentieth Year

"A typical instance of this is the story of the Land Office at Springfield, Mo. Now there hasn't been a piece of public land in Missouri for almost twenty years. The late Senator Stone prevented its being abolished soon after I came here, and do you know that it was five years before the office had been done away with? The Republicans had been holding it as patronage and the Democrats wanted to hold it as patronage, too.

"When I was Governor of Indiana we established what was known as the State Board of Accounts, and its job was to put into effect in the different State offices a uniform system of bookkeeping. The board was to examine the accounts of each of the

State officers who dealt with fiscal affairs, checking them up each year. The first year that the board was on the job it saved \$525,000 for the people of Indiana simply in the matter of supplies for the schools.

"It seems to me that something of that sort should be established for the Federal Government. The only trouble would be that it would mean the creation of another bureau. I'm so tired of seeing bills introduced for the creation of a new bureau that I'd love to see one for a chifonier.

Clerks as Fixtures Wasteful and Should Do Day's Work

"Such a board ought to have the power to reorganize the work of the executive departments and discharge clerks. It should have the last word in discharging clerks and there should be no appeal. This thing of allowing a Government clerk to become a fixture should be stopped. It is a tremendous waste. One of the things that ought to be done at once would be to have the clerks work eight instead of seven hours a day. Then right at once we could get along with one-eighth less clerks."

"Do you think there is any chance of such a board being established to reorganize the executive departments?" I asked.

"No," Mr. Marshall replied, "and there probably will not be until the Government gets so hard up that we cannot squeeze another dollar out of the people in the way of taxes."

"Do you think there is much waste in the appropriation bills for rivers and harbors, post offices and the like?"

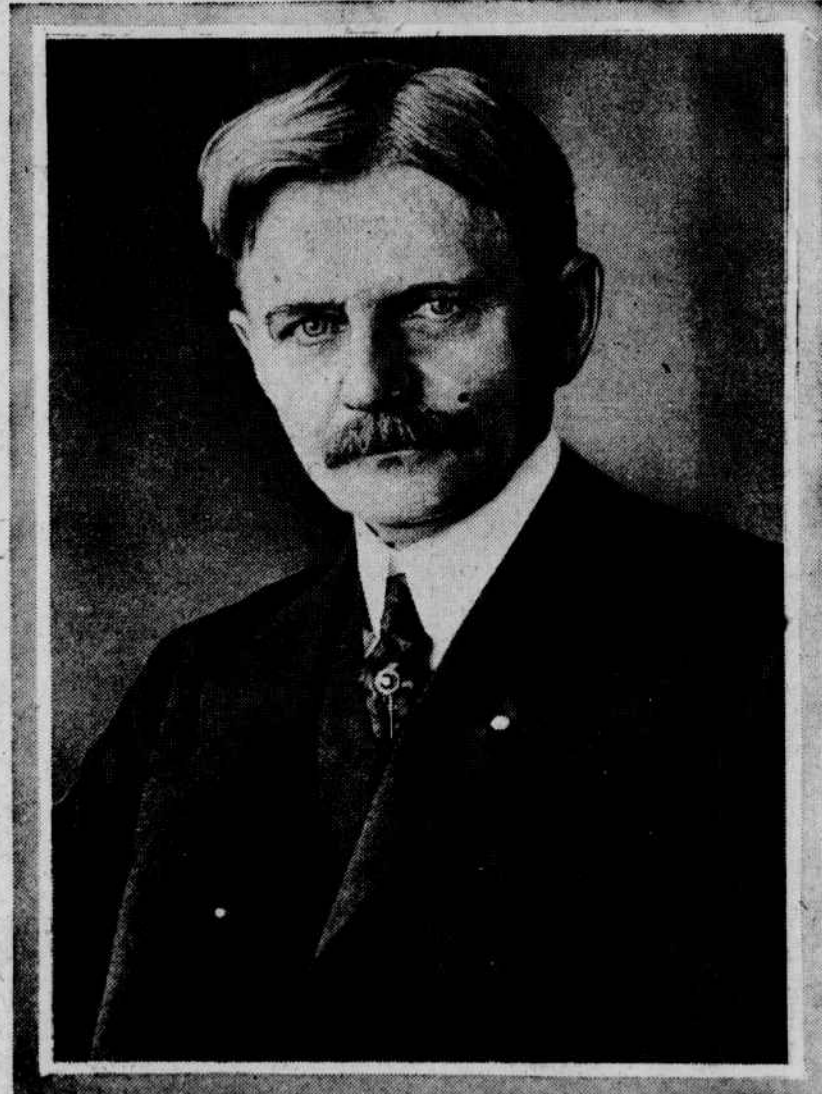
"Well," continued the Vice-President, "there is no sense in every town in the country having a post office. There are towns of 300 or 400 which have them and towns of 10,000 which have not. I mean post office buildings. In many instances it is cheaper for the Government to rent quarters for post office purposes.

"They have been using the argument that a post office served a patriotic purpose, that to have an American flag at the top increased the public patriotism. I think there is nothing in such an argument. My experience has been that some of the most disloyal persons during the war were those who went around with American flags in their buttonholes.

Has the Greatest Faith in the Integrity of Army Engineers

"I have the greatest confidence in the integrity of the army engineers, and I think that such sums as are appropriated for river and harbor improvements should be as a 'lump sum.' The engineers then should use their discretion as to what should and what should not be improved. It is a good thing, of course, to have waterways for commerce. On the other hand, 'pork barrel' items for the improvement of useless creeks ought to be stopped."

Thomas Riley Marshall of Indiana, retiring Vice-President, who has some very definite opinions about our methods of government after eight years of close study, and who does not hesitate to express himself about possible changes.



THOMAS RILEY MARSHALL.

"What," I inquired, "has been your most interesting work in the Senate?"

Mr. Marshall paused.

"The consideration of the Federal Reserve act," said he.

"It happens that I was one of five members of the Indiana State Democratic Committee who did not resign in 1896 during the Bryan campaign. I did not agree with those who did resign that the silver standard was unsound, taking the position myself that the matter of ratio was not so important as the establishment of a system which would give the country a currency system capable of expansion in time of need.

"Considered in this light, the result of the 1896 campaign was interesting. The vote showed that McKinley carried every State where there were sound banking facilities, where people did business by check; the States that Bryan carried were those which did not have such sound banking facilities, where the men carried their money in their pockets. It showed dissatisfaction with poor banking facilities.

His Stand Was for That of Better Banking Facilities

"Consequently I always stood for better banking and improved facilities, and so when the Federal Reserve bill came along I took the keenest sort of interest in the debate. Something occurred then that was interesting. There was much talk about the necessity of having a 15 per cent. gold reserve. One day I met Senator Burton, whom I regard as one of the most careful students of finance in the country, and I asked him why a 15 per cent. gold reserve was necessary.

"Why," said Senator Burton, "I've read almost every book on the subject of finance and in none of them does it explain the necessity for a 15 per cent. gold reserve. It has been considered necessary, simply accepted; nowhere is the reason given."

"It is a singular thing, but it was possible to see by careful consideration of the Senate debate on the Federal Reserve act that the European war was on its way. It was in December, 1913, that the bill went through, and the war did not come until the following August.

"I recall, when I signed the bill after it passed the Senate, that I predicted a war in Europe within five years. It seemed perfectly simple. The debate, of course, covered a wide range and the currency and financial systems of all the important nations were considered.

"Every man, woman and child in Germany was paying an income tax of 10 per

cent. The Kaiser had 800,000 men under arms and was building an immense navy. The Socialists were gaining in power, and one of their strongest and most popular policies was disarmament. The Socialists were becoming a menace to the Kaiser. He saw it coming and did not intend to let them topple him off the throne. He had to go to war in order to justify the huge expenditures for armament. He wanted to go to war with some nation he could lick, and it was from this that I saw the war coming."

Does Not Believe in Place in the President's Cabinet

"What is your conception of the duty of the Vice-President?" I asked.

"To preside in the Senate and to be the 'pinch hitter' for the Administration," Mr. Marshall said promptly. "I'm not in sympathy with Senator Harding's idea of having the Vice-President attend the Cabinet meetings. There are several reasons. Either a Vice-President is capable of being President if occasion demands or he is not. There would be nothing quite so pitiful and so dangerous as a Vice-President, on becoming President, trying to carry out the policies of the man he succeeded. He ought to have ideas of his own and be able to put them into force, unhampered.

"Another thing. In a Cabinet session a Vice-President, if there would be any excuse for his attending, would present his ideas as to how a situation were to be met. His ideas might, or might not, be accepted. If they were not accepted then his usefulness as a defender of the Administration would be destroyed.

"I believe the Vice-President is able to do much good around the country explaining and defending the Administration. This he would be unable to do wholeheartedly if he had been invited to offer a suggestion and it had been rejected. He would have no heart to defend the policy which finally was adopted and which needed defence.

"I do not believe the people of the country have been just at all times to the President, Mr. Wilson. I believe that he was forced into the war by public sentiment.

"When the European war came the President issued a proclamation of neutrality, and I believe I am the only living man who observed it literally. Before many months had passed the country was nine-tenths for the Allies.

"That idea spread into Germany. It was then that Germany committed the offences that drove us into the war. Had the neutrality proclamation been adhered to the situation we have to-day would not have been."